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Frontiers of Myth and Myths of the Frontier in Caroline Gordon's "Tom Rivers" and "The Captive"

Elisabeth Lamothe

- 1 Since the American West and its volatile frontier conjure up as many myths or “mythologies”¹ as the South does, both in the popular and literary imagination, it would be quite fruitful to examine the potentialities for renewed artistic expression produced by the conflation between the two spaces, or their “confluence” (Welty 103). To what extent did Southern women writers seek new territory as background for their stories and to what use did they put such displacement? Did they rely upon displacement for thematic but also stylistic change, innovation and maybe even liberation from a regional literary tradition which was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, quite entrenched in what critic Michael Kreyling has called “orthodox narratives of identity” (xii)?
- 2 The Agrarians’ manifesto *I’ll Take My Stand* sought to define and prescribe the region’s scripts of identity and development yet it is obvious that even those close to the members of the group engaged in forms of dis-location or displacement that sought to revise those very scripts. Caroline Gordon had a very conventional Southern upbringing and was able to take advantage of the Agrarians’ activities due to her husband Allen Tate’s central role in the movement.² She nevertheless enjoyed significant success of her own and was singled out by another “grande dame” of the Southern short story, Flannery O’Connor, as “the lady who taught me so much about writing” (27). In the early thirties, Gordon was writing more about the frontier and the West, Texas and western Kentucky, after the American revolution and in the 19th century than she was on and about the Deep South, at least implicitly. Gordon was passionate about the history of the frontier and her childhood was filled with stories of eighteenth-century Virginia and of her relative Meriwether Lewis, leader of the illustrious transcontinental expedition alongside William Clark. These family connections were to become the subject of her unfinished last novel, *Joy of the*

Mountains, which concerns Lewis's relationship to President Jefferson, his explorations, and his mysterious death in Tennessee in 1809. Furthermore, Gordon's interest in Native American culture and frontiersmen and women is evident in her writing. Her work depicts characters venturing forth, grappling with the harsh realities of frontier environment, an impulse she viewed as the very essence of storytelling. This is made clear in her critical study of fiction, *How To Read A Novel*, when she indicates that to her, "the one true subject of fiction is the adventures of a hero or heroine—that is the story of what happened to some man or woman who, through answering *the call to adventure* which constitutes the action of the story, comes to stand out from his or her fellows as a remarkable person" (74, my emphasis). The other essential ingredient in fiction resided, according to her, in the successful emergence of "voice, rather than plot" (*How To Read a Novel* 75). This stress on the central place of voice is in keeping with the concerns of Southern Renaissance women writers who, as analyzed by Carolyn Perry, "perhaps in reaction to a decidedly male tradition [...] placed particular emphasis on women taking control of telling their stories" (Perry and Weaks 238).

- 3 The American frontier experience produced a very distinct genre, known as the captivity narrative, which is still taken up by contemporary writers: a beautifully crafted recent novel by Melanie Wallace, *Blue Horse Dreaming*, engages in such rewriting. In the novel, the members of a garrison lost in the West, plagued by hunger, strife and literal oblivion give way to the basest instincts while a former female captive, redeemed at last from the Natives, is far from rejoicing in her liberation. She actually mutilates herself and lets herself die because she has been returned to a civilized life that alienates and confines her, making her more captive than she was when she lived among the Natives who kidnapped her. The reader is thus led to wonder whether there is not greater, more stifling captivity in a supposedly free and civilized life than we think. Besides, not once does the narrative brush upon the notion of the protagonist's suffering in captivity: such a significant omission is worth inquiring into, as it is also silenced in Caroline Gordon's short story "The Captive" (1933). Kathryn Derounian observes that captivity narratives constitute "the first American literary form dominated by women's experiences as captives, story-tellers, writers, and readers" (xi). Its central premise focuses on the disruption of identity through violent separation from family and community. Captives were traditionally concerned with asserting their identity in opposition to the Native community that had abducted them. However, what Gordon found more relevant were the boundary-crossing strategies her protagonist could develop in order not to remain captive of cultural "scripts of identity."
- 4 Gordon adapts the genres of the frontier and captivity narratives, as this essay will demonstrate by focusing first on the rewriting of the traditional frontier short story in "Tom Rivers." Later on this becomes apparent with a more radical transformation of the captivity narrative, a genre Gordon appropriated and condensed into the surprising "Captive." Narrative point of view is dramatically different in the two stories, as the male voice in "Tom Rivers" adopts a very different perspective towards the frontier experience from the first-person, female narrator of "The Captive." It would seem that, like her protégée Flannery O'Connor, whom she probably influenced in that respect, Gordon was a somewhat ambivalent and contradictory figure who functioned as a writer in the masculine realm of the Southern Agrarians by adopting a relatively misogynistic stance and denying female subjectivity. She obviously found it difficult to discard those masculine strategies yet the *tour de force* of "The Captive" testifies to the

originality of her feminist perspective, as she deviates from representing captivity along the lines of what historian Richard Slotkin called “an exaggerated and emotionally heightened illustration of the moral and psychological situation of the community [...]. Their ties with their families, with civilization itself, had been forsaken for the sake of their God’s will” (65).

Remapping Southern Literature

- 5 The two stories are, as mentioned earlier, somewhat at odds with Gordon’s relatively uniform focus on the South as a locale for her fiction; I would contend that it makes her the precursor of an ulterior tendency for Southern writers to adopt *multiple* regional identities. Critic Robert Brinkmeyer has devoted a study entitled *Remapping Southern Literature* to such writers. He begins by examining the attitudes toward identity and mobility which emerged during the Southern Renaissance. Focusing on the small town and the countryside as ideal settings, the dominant Southern myth, he writes, involved celebrating folks who do not leave their birthplace but who find ways of integrating themselves into the community while maintaining a certain degree of individuality. For these writers, he argues, the “solitary figure breaking free [...] would, in the fiction of most Southern writers, be less a hero than a potential psychopath, a person tragically alone and isolated, cut off from the nourishing bonds of family and community” (4). The great majority of Southern writers tended to express ambivalence toward mobility, seeing it not as a positive sign of progress—an expression of freedom, independence, and self-reliance—but rather as “irresponsible escapism” (8). In other words, fixed scripts of identity and becoming were to be followed. Brinkmeyer notes that after the fifties however, place came to have a less powerful hold on Southern writers, as demonstrated in the works of Cormac McCarthy, Barbara Kingsolver and James Dickey among others. A few decades before such entanglement with place and cultural norms was gradually forsaken, Caroline Gordon experimented with displacement and the figure of the loner: in “Tom Rivers,” she adopted a male narrator’s voice to interrogate the tension between a Southern community characterized by stasis and the mythical mobility of a frontiersman. My interpretation is that Tom Rivers is the captive of a “wide net” of myth-making, to borrow from one of Eudora Welty’s short-story titles.³
- 6 “Tom Rivers” has an extremely loose plot. It is a first-person narrative by Lew Allard, a young Kentuckian struck by wanderlust who goes West to Texas to “see life and ride horses” (27) and rejoin his outlaw figure of a cousin, the eponymous Tom Rivers. One notes the shallowness of such ambition, as riding horses could barely make for greater self-knowledge—but it is in keeping with the prescribed accomplishments expected of well-to-do, young Southern men. Writing from a male point of view, Gordon adopts the elements of the Southwestern mythology based upon the categories identified by Mark Busby: “journeying, ambivalence, primitivism, racism and sexism” (435). Indeed, as Larry Goodwyn also puts it in an essay dealing with “The Frontier Myth and Southwestern Literature,” “the legend is inherently masculine: women are not so much without courage as absent altogether” and “the myth is primitively racist: it provided no mystique of triumph for Mexicans, Negroes and Indians” (qtd. in Busby 435).
- 7 The story first reads as a meditation on storytelling and the process at work in myth-making, as Lew Allard opens his narrative with a long reflection on vision, perspective

and the powers of voice. The first-person narrator belongs to a large Southern "family connection" (25) whose relationships are measured by a "subtler cycle" (24) than that of mere family visits: the subtle art of storytelling which gives each one "his place and a sort of record in memory" (24) guarantees a form of immortality as "we hold them in our minds until they seem to live again" (25). Storytelling takes place under a tree, an apt symbol of continuity and connection, and voice is felt to have the power of breathing new life into those who are "dead now or gone to places so far away that they seem dead" (24). Yet despite the apparent revitalizing power of ritualized storytelling, the running metaphor of light and darkness calls the reader's attention to the way perception also replicates a petrifying pattern. The voice of the male narrator holds Tom Rivers captive in his own myth, reproducing the same story over and over, like the never-changing pattern of "light fall[ing] under and through the boughs to strike always in the same pattern. You notice how it falls that way year after year, changing only with the seasons [...]" (25). Tom's life has become sacred in the sense given to the term by Mircea Eliade in his study of myths, as it is taken for "exemplary and significant," belonging to a "sacred tradition, primordial revelation, exemplary model" (11). The hero displays the "supernatural" qualities of mythical beings, capable of extraordinary feats and providing "exemplary models" (17-19).

- 8 Yet the pattern conceals as much as it reveals, for new perspectives about Tom radically alter the ideal figure the narrator would like to see secure and unchanging atop a pedestal. What he is after is the construction and perpetuation of a masculinity that nears perfection in Southern terms for it has always refused to yield to the demands of the feminine⁴ and embodies all the exceptional values the South felt its men should have; men who were "strong on kinship" (27), "out of the ordinary" (31), their spirit tempered by "moral compunction" (30) who nevertheless do not have any qualms about keeping a "little Mexican girl in one of those houses across the tracks" (29) as any Southern gentleman would, who does not think twice about sexual promiscuity with a second-class citizen and finally, a race and class-conscious displaced aristocrat confident in the belief that "a negro knows somebody's going to take care of him" (37).⁵ The setting and characterization painstakingly detailed by the narrator fall into the category of stereotypical representations and myths not only of the West but also of the Southern character. Besides, the story reads much like a play performed for the entertainment of an audience so tickled by the character of Tom that it "starts" with "half pleasure, half pride" (25) when his name is spoken and joyfully seeks to "keep up the illusion, with a name here, a name there. Seeking to make the scene more complete [...]" (25). Yet the scene has been exited forever by the hero, who chose exile and eventual disappearance rather than the enclosure and confinement of Southern mores and values.
- 9 Southern women were no strangers to issues of captivity in their experience of gender, race, community, and constructions of history. Historically, as Anne Firor Scott has demonstrated, they were quite confined by a tenaciously held myth of womanhood within a patriarchal family structure where "any tendency on the part of any of the members of the system to assert themselves against the master threatened the whole" (16). The weightiness of such conventions must have fueled Gordon's admiration for frontierswomen, as she made it obvious in a letter to fellow writer Katherine Anne Porter,⁶ insisting that "the exploits of some of those pioneer women are things that usually occur on battlefields" (qtd. in Boyle 81). She praised the character of Jennie Wiley, the protagonist of "The Captive" and "the state of mind of this pioneer woman,

her life and her experience, [as] the spiritual foundations of thousands of Americans” (qtd. in Jonza 111).

Female Heroics and the Art of Crossing Boundaries

- 10 Writing “The Captive” may thus have been paradoxically liberating, an impression strengthened by the original title of the short story. A close reading of the working notes for the story by Rebecca Harrison sheds lights on the fact that at the time of writing, Gordon lived very close to the Cumberland River situated near the family estate of Benfolly. She originally titled the story after that river, which partly explains the dedicatory tone of the original title “To Cumberland.”⁷ Yet because she was most probably feeling like a captive at Benfolly, she must have considered that the land was weighing her down, that she was caught in a pattern of mundane activities and domestic work detrimental to her artistic endeavors. So who was the real captive of the creative act: the character or its author? Harrison notes that Gordon made a pun upon this in a letter to Ford Maddox Ford, separating the two words “Cumber Land,” indicating that the land literally hindered her, the home place in the South acting like a burden upon her creative faculties. Thus, renaming the story “The Captive” takes on added significance: the South was indeed a trap and this story of a captive pioneer woman could be read as symbolic of Gordon’s own creative subjugation and of her attempts to unshackle herself, as she resented catering to the Agrarians’ meetings and demands and not writing as much and as freely as she wanted to.
- 11 Gordon had found the idea for this story when reading William Connelley’s historical account of the abduction of pioneer Jenny Wiley; she had been so struck by it that she remembered the day of discovery quite clearly, as she told interviewers:
- I was in the stacks in the Vanderbilt library, and I took this book down idly [...] and looked at it, and I got very excited about it. [...] I read it at first just because I found it so interesting. And then the idea of finishing the story came to me. It seemed to me that the story was there. I don’t think I thought about it much at the time. I just knew I had to write that story. (Interview with Baum 449)
- 12 Spurred on by the ellipses, by what remained silent in the narrative, Gordon “got the notion that [I] could finish it” (interview with Baum 448). An interview reveals that Gordon also felt deep identification with Wiley and an interest in using the genre of the captivity narrative to comment upon the plight of women. First, the act of writing the story, embodying Jennie’s voice, caused great turmoil as she insisted that she “suffered more writing it than any story [she] ever wrote.” She also claimed that the process of writing left her feeling as if “[she] had been living in the wilderness for weeks from jerky. [...] And I was exhausted” (interview with Baum 449).
- 13 As Christopher Castiglia asserts in his study of the trope of captivity and boundary-crossing: “Captive white women have shown [...] that while they are never free, they have nevertheless developed voices with which to denaturalize and revise their home cultures’ scripts of identity and to rearticulate American genres, popular rhetoric, and mythology so as to speak the experiences of those marginalized by the dominant national language” (12).⁸ This subversive potential afforded by the captive and/or redeemed woman may explain why the historical Jennie Wiley’s documented pregnancy at the moment of her capture, her delivery among the Indians, and her infant’s initiation test, though all in Connelly, are omitted in Gordon’s fictional

revision; besides, her brother's death alongside that of her children at the time of the initial attack is also omitted. Those deletions of some of the historical account's aspects suggest that the writer's interest lay in Jennie's experience as a woman more than a sister, a focus on the way she copes with the changes in her maternal identity and her wrenching away from domesticity, as well as her ability to transcend the cultural limitations she was bound by. Gordon also radically departs from previous Southern captivity narratives which, according to Karen Weyler, "fervently reject the possibility of transculturation and emphasize the ardent longings of their subjects to return to their white families and friends" (27). Free from culturally established frontiers, the experience of captivity becomes a destabilizing agent that, ironically, allows for reflection, accomplishment and creative authorial voice. First Gordon's Jinny finds the means of her liberation in acculturation and second, it is the heroine who escapes by her own means: she is never rescued and restored by men to civilized society, thereby manifesting her own resilience and ingenuity.

- 14 From the outset of her narrative, Jinny takes an unconcealed pride in having crossed gender role boundaries; determined not to appear contrite, she also sustains a remarkable refusal to indulge in sentiment. She comes across from the start as a headstrong and "brash" woman, the only one "in the settlements who would have undertaken to stay on that place all day with nothing but a parcel of children" (177). She will not take no for an answer, even from her spouse, as she prods him along to make him undertake a trip for salt and reveals her power in decision-making: "I knew if he got to studying about it he wouldn't go [...] I'd as soon be scalped now and have it done with it as keep on thinking about it all the time" (175). Likewise, she never indulges in self-pity when she loses three of her four children, killed during the Indian raid on her cabin. She coldly states, after ascertaining their deaths, that she "won't be getting any more help" from her slaughtered oldest boy, a strangely utilitarian comment displacing emotion onto the need for action. The surprisingly detached tone never underlines the effect the children's deaths have on her but rather the rapidity of the attack and the aspect of the aggressors. She is more thorough in her description of the Indians' "rings and trinkets" and adamant in her refusal of sentiment "I looked away quick [from the] scalps of my children" (179), even relying on generic articles rather than personal pronouns to refer to her now deceased offspring "Sadie was *the* oldest girl" (182, my emphasis). Not once does she break speed in her narrative to bemoan the loss of her identity as a mother, but instead portrays herself as always on the lookout for signs allowing her to cope with her bewildering environment. Grief is duly repressed and only gushes forth twice: once in a long wail she lets out during her sleep, and the second time when she experiences sheer human empathy with her captor, when the latter tells her of the loss of his own child. The tears shed on that occasion signal her now complete imperviousness to the racial stigmatization the pioneers resorted to against Indians.
- 15 Historical captivity narratives often depict Native American captors as a threat to white sexual purity, thus justifying seizure and control of Indian lands and the attempted extermination of the racial Other. Gordon reverses this aspect of the genre to reveal the more realistically likely sexual tainting of the white female body by a white man rather than by a *savage* captor. Gordon's Jinny recounts a memory about Lance Rayburn, a trapper who appears to have attempted to rape her when she rejected his presents and advances:

He come toward me, and before I knowed what he was up to he was on me and trying to bear me to the ground. He was a strong man but I was stout, too, and I stood up to him. We was rassling around in the bushes quite some time before he got me down, and then he had to keep both his hands on my chest. I laid there right still, *looking up at him*. (191)

- 16 Jinny invokes her “pappy” as a protective force as she resists the attack; yet, this has no effect on Rayburn’s violence, as he scorns all the other men on the settlement. She quickly acknowledges the impotence of white male protection and bests Rayburn by denying him any rights to her even if he goes as far as ravishing her. Her brave claim that “it ain’t going to do you no good. I ain’t going to have none of you no matter what happens” (191) clearly implies that because she denies him the power of restoring her honor by proposing marriage after he has violated her, she makes Rayburn powerless to act, and thereby bests, even “hurts” him. Thus, only Jinny’s faith in her own voice and freedom to choose the outcome of her fate save her. It is not reliance on white male protection or codes of sexual virtue which decide her fate. Ultimately, she would rather exist as a tainted woman than as the wife of her rapist made respectable by the institution of marriage and she does not shrink from the evocation of sexuality. Textual evidence suggests that Jinny is attracted to a Native American man, Mad Dog: she observes him the night following her abduction and describes his physical appeal in unambiguous terms, without hiding behind the facade of a demure and proper “lady,” as she bluntly describes his nakedness: “When he moved, you could see the muscles moving, too, in his big chest and up and down his naked legs. An Indian woman would have thought him a fine-looking man, tall and well formed in every way” (181).
- 17 She further crosses identity and sexual borders in addition to speaking their language. Jinny adapts to Indian ways: she learns to work like an Indian, and even accepts the Indian party’s leader Crowmocker as “a father” (194).⁹ Jinny does not hesitate to adopt the physical appearance of an Indian female, including face painting. She notes that the elder chief: “Fixed me up some of the red root mixed with bear’s grease, and after I’d been putting it on my face for a while you couldn’t told me from an Indian woman, except for my light eyes” (194). She does not lament the loss of her former identity when Crowmocker tells her that her white blood will be cleansed from her when she is formally adopted, making her feel Indian and embrace all the tribe’s ways. In fact, the actual adoption rite is all that stands between her and total assimilation: Jinny looks Indian, speaks the language, and has become so comfortable that “the Indian way of doing things seemed natural to me. I thought nothing of seeing dark faces around me all the time” (195). Her transculturation seems complete at the end of the story, when a white woman outside the fort she eventually rallies mistakes her for an Indian and runs “inside the fort, the children after her” (208).
- 18 Far from producing sheer bewilderment and dismay, her solitary and meditative work in the wilderness allows her personal space to think, dream and even create. In nature, she exercises her imaginative faculties and becomes a creator able to transform the most rudimentary material; when faced with a pile of buffalo bones weathered by the elements, she works on giving them meaning:
- I couldn’t keep my eyes off the bones. I would take them up in my hand and turn them over and over, wondering what manner of beasts they had belonged to. Once I made myself a little beast, laying all the bones out on some lacy moss, the front feet stiff like it was galloping off in the woods, the hind legs drawn up under him. A hare it might have been or a little fawn. Or maybe a beast that nobody ever heard of before. (193)

- 19 Jinny thus symbolically uses the land to create in contradiction to male impulses to clear and colonize it. She puts the bones together, gives them shape, and imagines them free in the wilderness, a stretch of the imagination that the narrator of "Tom Rivers" is incapable of performing; this freedom gives her the potential to discover something original: "that nobody ever heard of before" (193). The affinity between the wilderness and creation is further supported through the type of memories she conjures up, an important impulse according to Gordon who stressed the fact that "one way of asserting your individuality is through your memories" (qtd. in Rodenberger 32). Even the dream of escape that shows her the way to the fort is a product of her own creative power fostered through her spiritual connection to the forest and the native culture she has embraced. Her mind produces a dream vision and provides her own map for rescue, an occurrence possible only in the wilderness where, according to Native American beliefs, spiritual power connects human beings and the natural world that surrounds them, allowing individuals to cross into different states of consciousness. This connection between the internal and the external was embodied in native culture through dream visions, which served an important and central part in the spiritual lives of most North American tribes.

Conclusion

- 20 Gordon's experience with rewriting frontier stories sparked her broader interest in the exploits of pioneer women and their contact with Native Americans; short-story writing was obviously a testing-ground leading to longer forms, as she later wrote a full-length novel set in the pioneer period, *Green Centuries* (1941), which required extensive research on the Cherokee. Writing "The Captive" involved painstaking work on form, as Gordon faced the crucial problem of condensation of the original narrative: divided up into six numbered sections of unequal length, each part ends with the protagonist's slumber and the following one with an awakening into a new identity or state of awareness. Stressing her protagonist's ability to interpret nature and the wilderness without attempting to tame it, her willingness to engage in creative work, Gordon underlines the degree of irony there is in the very notion of captivity for women. Such feminist perspective was taken up more recently by Angela Carter in "Our Lady of the Massacre" (1985), a revisionist captivity narrative set in 17th century colonial America, in which Carter explores the many forms of subjugation and control devised by a so-called civilized English society. The only path to selfhood and expression is found in the transgression of social and cultural constraints, from indentured servitude, sexual coercion and criminalization to equality and identity among the Iroquois.

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NOTES

1. Mythology is to be understood as Barthes defined it: a discourse conveying a message and materialized by representations of various sorts (194-95).
2. Tate emphasized the fact that myth constituted their common identity: the Agrarians were "an intensive and historical group as opposed to the eclectic and cosmopolitan groups that flourished in the East. There was a sort of unity of feeling, of which we were not then very much aware, which came out of—to give it a big name—a common historical myth" (33).
3. At the end of the twenties Gordon began collecting bits and pieces that she could use on her fiction and gathered from "the talk on the porch" and her uncle Rob the story of a distant relative, Tom Rivers, who was a cowboy in Texas in the 1890s. According to her uncle, he was "utterly fearless, took people's guns out of their hands by the barrel and then handed them back but first, like a lady handing somebody a tea spoon" (qtd. in Jonza 119).
4. Tom was asked by his fiancée to stop drinking and as he would not abide, he left the South and never married.
5. The "qualities" exhibited by Tom and his relatives read like an illustration of the southern civilization's admirable features as defined by the Agrarian manifesto: "a fair balance of aristocratic and democratic elements," "diversity within unity," "leisureliness, devotion to family and neighborhood, local self-sufficiency and self-government," and of course "the South was agrarian, and agrarian it still remains very largely" (52-54).
6. Katherine Anne Porter sent the story and a commentary about it in a letter to her father in early 1933. She is somewhat critical of her counterpart's work, as she was more preoccupied with the initial version of the captivity narrative, the male point of view expressed in it and her own relative's role in Jennie Wiley's redemption: "Caroline says that this Henry Skaggs was an old man about eighty years old at the time he rescued Jinny, and that it happened around 1780. So the old fellow would possibly be the father of your grandfather, I should think [...] Caroline didn't make him out such a hero as the actual story has it, but that was because she wished to make the woman the chief figure [...]. But I said to her, that she should either make up her stories out of her own imagination, or if she must re-writer history, not to libel my relations when she does it [...]. She didn't exactly libel Henry, and she didn't mention his name, but I don't see why she couldn't have stuck a little closer to the facts just the same" (qtd. in Bayley 91).
7. Robert Brinkmeyer's analysis of her situation sustains this argument; he notes that in the early thirties, "central to her personal conflicts was a deep love for the South and its rural ways on the one hand, and on the other hand a realization that Southern life had little relevance in the modern industrial—and artistic—world. Unlike her husband Allen Tate, Gordon was never ardently caught up in the Agrarian movement. When she and Tate returned from Paris in 1930 to make a stab at being Southerners again by living on a Tennessee farm, Gordon, despite enjoying the solitude and quiet, quickly became bored and restless. To her friend Sally Wood, she wrote (31 July 1930): 'It will be a godsend to have somebody to talk to beside the kin. I am getting tired of them. There is no amusement here except driving around to various creeks to go swimming'" (New 65-66).
8. To Castiglia, the primary function of the genre is to maintain the established interlocking hierarchies of race and gender in the New World.
9. He becomes a mentor to Jennie, showing her how to scrape and cure animal pelts, make deer thread, and even call deer out of the brush. He tells her that once she is formally adopted, he will teach her the art of native medicine by revealing ancient secrets.

ABSTRACTS

Comme sa consœur Eudora Welty a pu le faire dans le recueil *The Golden Apples*, Caroline Gordon a puisé dans les mythes grecs, tout comme dans le temps mythique de l'histoire du Sud, une abondante source d'inspiration. Cet article s'attache à l'étude de deux nouvelles (« Tom Rivers » et « The Captive ») pour montrer que le mythe chez cette auteure fait question sur deux plans. Tout d'abord au niveau de la production, dès lors qu'il s'agit de concilier répétition et création ; un processus de destruction et de métamorphose est à l'œuvre. De plus, le rapport de Gordon aux mythes du Sud, qu'ils soient familiaux ou historiques, dans leurs dimensions thématique et spirituelle, semble également indiquer que leur réécriture est non seulement aux sources d'une fiction de retour aux origines mais aussi une manière de s'émanciper des postulats des Agrariens par un déplacement vers la Frontière et ses propres mythes.

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Elisabeth Lamothe is Associate Professor of American Studies at Le Mans Université. Her research focuses on women's studies as well as writings and visual arts by women: she published on Southern women's fiction and autobiographical works (Welty, Glasgow, Porter) but also on the works of Toni Morrison and Margaret Atwood before turning to diaspora and exile literatures. She is currently working on a book-length study of Vietnamese-American life-writings and short stories while contributing to developing the study of young adult literature in France.